DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 305 PS 030 690

AUTHOR	Robertson, Janet, Ed.; Fleet, Alma, Ed.
TITLE	Unpacking Observation and Documentation: Experiences from Italy, Sweden and Australia. Conference Proceedings (4th, North Ryde, Australia, September 24-25, 1999).
INSTITUTION	Macquarie Univ., North Ryde (Australia). Inst. of Early Childhood.
PUB DATE	1999-09-00
NOTE	65p.; For other proceedings from this conference, see PS 030 691-692.
AVAILABLE FROM	Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University, New South Wales 2109, Australia. Tel: 61-2-9850-9851; Fax: 61-2-9850-9836; e-mail: afleet@iec.iec.mq.edu.au.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Documentation; Educational Practices; Foreign Countries; *Observation; *Preschool Education; *Reggio Emilia Approach; Teacher Student Relationship; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS	Australia; Italy; Sweden

ABSTRACT

This conference proceedings compiles papers presented at the Institute of Early Childhood in September 1999, the fourth in a series examining the challenges which the schools of Reggio Emilia present the early childhood profession in Australia. The conference focused on the practices of observing children and documenting their thinking, the cornerstones of the Reggio Emilia approach to preschool education, as the Reggio Emilia approach is implemented in preschools in Australia, Sweden, and Italy. Following an introductory editorial, the academic papers included are: (1) "Early Childhood Pedagogy in a Changing World--A Practice-Oriented Research Project Troubling Dominant Discourses within the Field of Early Childhood Education" (Gunilla Dahlberg); (2) "Personalised Learning" (Alma Fleet); (3) "Three Different Constructions of the Child--The Childhood Landscapes" (Gunilla Dahlberg); and (4) "Observation and Documentation: 'Interpreting the Journey'" (Janet Robertson). Documentations of various projects at preschools are described. The final paper, "The Last Word" (Alma Fleet), distinguishes documentation and display, and highlights the challenges presented by the Italian educators of Reggio Emilia. Each academic paper contains references. (KB)

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Unpacking observation and documentation:

Experiences from Italy, Sweden and Australia.

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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Friday 24th & Saturday 25th September 1999.

Held at the

Institute of Early Childhood

Macquarie University, North Ryde

Building X5B

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Unpacking observation and documentation

Conference Proceedings

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Editorial

Observing children is the cornerstone of early childhood practice in Australia: however, the teachers in Reggio Emilia have taken this practice one step further by starting with a different perspective. Their complex, perceptive and often multi-media observations are interpreted and included in "documentation". Not merely record-keeping, description or display, "documentation" makes children's thinking visible to parents, colleagues and members of the community and provides sites for children and staff to revisit and rethink the pedagogical implications of their work. Documentation may become one of the most powerful tools we have as advocates for young children's abilities and rights, and for the work which children and teachers do together. To avoid confusion with the more global sense of "documenting," we might be wise to use the Italian *"Documentazione"* when we are referring to the type of Documentation, which is encapsulated in the work of the Italian educators.

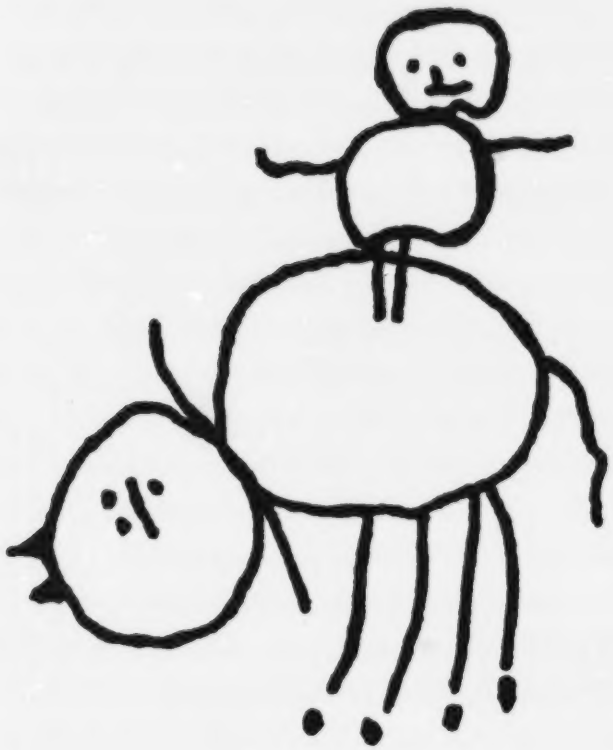
These proceedings encapsulate a conference, which is the 4th in a series examining the challenges which the schools of Reggio Emilia (a small town in the north of Italy) present the early childhood profession in Australia. The conference provided an opportunity to unpack the power and complexity of observation and documentation in Reggio Emilia, Sweden and Australia. The ideas, which are presented here, are another step in a journey, which many of us are sharing together. We welcome those of you who are new to this investigation and warmly greet those we have travelled with before. We trust you will be both refreshed and stimulated by the work in these proceedings.

Janet & Alma

Janet Robertson and Alma Fleet

Early Childhood Pedagogy in a Changing World - a practice-oriented research project troubling dominant discourses within the field of early childhood education.

Gunilla Dahlberg



Early Childhood Pedagogy in a Changing World - a practice-oriented research project troubling dominant discourses within the field of early childhood education.

Gunilla Dahlberg

I want our preschool to be a preschool without walls, and which is placed on a public square

Kirsti Hakkola

For this lecture I have been asked to reflect on the question of what education is and relate that question to the Reggio-inspired work that we have been doing in Stockholm, Sweden, in the project "Early Childhood Pedagogy in a Changing World". I will start by addressing the question of what education is, can be and should be and relate that to our understanding of Reggio Emilia and to our project.

A forum in civil society?

During the eighties, in the context of a shift towards a more market-oriented social welfare system, Sweden, like the rest of the Western world, has seen a change in the way institutions of early childhood education and care are being conceptualized. In Sweden today we still have a state financed system, and a law offering children whose parents work or study, the right to have a place in a day-care centre from one year old, when the parental leave period ends. However, during the eighties there has been a rupture in the "talk about" the field of early childhood education. Earlier the field was constructed as a central part of a spirit of community, a common good, while today the field is more and more understood as a market, and as a matter of freedom of choice and as a service for customers. The work being carried out is also compared with the work carried out in private business, and the pre-school teacher and the day care nurse are supposed to become more of an entrepreneur, successfully selling her/his "product" on a market (Dahlberg, 1999). In this change, where parents are seen as customers and consumers, and the day-care workers and the pre-school teachers are supposed to manage the institution to ensure high productivity, the talk about quality, standards and evaluation have become significant. Common questions today are: How do we measure quality? What are the most cost effective programmes? What standards do we need? How can we best achieve desirable outcomes?

In our research-work we have explored and problematized this change (Dahlberg, Lundgren & Åsén, 1991; Dahlberg & Åsén, 1994, Dahlberg, 1999). We have argued that the common feature of questions such as the above is their technical and managerial nature aspiring to reduce the world to a set of objective

and value free statements. In this process, the instruments of evaluation come in as new instruments of power as they tell the practitioners what is seen as valuable to do in a pedagogical practice.

Early childhood institutions serve important economic purposes in a society. However, from our standpoint, the purpose of early childhood pedagogy and early childhood institutions must always be related to the philosophical and ethical question of what we, as a society, want for our children here and now and in the future, a question which we have to pose ourselves again and again in different times. From this, a question such as "What is education?" cannot be answered from a universal and value free perspective. There is no essential or 'naturals' of education. What education is, shifts from historical times and within cultural contexts. Furthermore, early childhood institutions and the pedagogical work in which they engage are arbitrary and socially constructed. From possible alternative constructions, we always have to make choices, and the choices we make tell a lot about our way of conceptualizing children´s potentials, position and civic rights in society and also how we have constructed our forms of democracy.

This exploration opened up for us the possibility of understanding the early childhood institution as a forum in civil society where children and adults meet and participate together in projects of cultural, social, political and economic significance; and as such being community institutions bearing cultural and symbolic significance (Dahlberg & Åsén, 1994). In a later work I have, together with two colleagues further developed this thinking (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1977) in a book called *"Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care. A Postmodern Perspective on the Problem with Quality."* We asked why this managerial language has become so widespread, so dominating at this particular time? What are the consequences for children, parents and others, and what practices does it produce? What other languages can we choose to speak?

In relation to this and our earlier work we argued that early childhood institutions can play an important part in constituting civil society, and become a primary means for fostering the visibility, inclusion and active participation of the young child in civil society. The idea of the early childhood institution as a forum, a public space, where the child is seen as a citizen and part of a community, then presupposes that we formulate and continuously reformulate "a social contract" between the individual, the public institutions, the state and the market. We also understand early childhood pedagogy as one of the main projects of that public space. This requires participatory relationships, where children, pedagogues, parents, politicians and others can be involved. To do this we have to construct forums, which embody the ethics of an encounter - an encounter which is characterized by an exploratory mode of seeing, listening and challenging.

Early childhood institutions as forums in civil society need to be open to all families with young children. Access should not be constrained either by cost or by admission criteria, for example, the employment status of parents. To be so, early childhood institutions should be largely or wholly publicly resourced and available as a right to all local children, and as such being not only forums, but also community institutions. These forums can function as a locus of participation and dialogue, enabling politicians and others to engage actively and productively. In this work we maintained, that in a knowledge and learning society all children should have this right; otherwise we will get even more severe processes of exclusion and segregation than today. We also argued that these institutions do not necessarily have to be publicly managed, but they have to be governed and evaluated by the goals set up through the democratic process of a particular society.

The inspiration from Reggio

In this explorative work, the experiences from Reggio Emilia have been of great value to us. In my own encounter with Reggio, I noted that their conversation about early childhood contained little of the above managerial language. Their language and vocabulary was quite different, and so were the consequences in terms of their practice. In their work they always start with the image of the child, and their pedagogical practice is permeated with an active participation and a reflective culture, which values, but also problematizes, notions of democracy, dialogue, diversity and uncertainty. They do this by an active and enquiring relationship to many of the major issues of our times - childhood, gender, the environment, peace and human coexistence - as well as developments in science, philosophy and ethics - or in the words of Loris Malaguzzi, "pedagogy is not generated by itself, it is only created if one stands in a loving relationship and in confrontation with other expressions of the present".

The Swedish connection with Reggio

Reggio Emilia seems to have held a special attraction for Sweden. The Reggio exhibition, *The Hundred Languages of Children*, presenting the work of the early childhood institutions in the city, was first invited to Stockholm in 1981. That first exhibition was seen by around 90,000 Swedes and was followed by a new exhibition five years later. During the last ten years almost 3,000 Swedes have visited Reggio to study the pedagogical work, and many books and films about Reggio have been published in Sweden during the 1980s and 1990s (Barsotti, 1981, 1986a, 1986b, 1994, 1997; Wallin, 1986, 1996; Wallin, Maechel & Barsotti, 1981).

We think that this is not just by chance. There are some striking similarities between Sweden and the Emilia Romagna region in northern Italy where Reggio is situated. Both have undergone somewhat similar processes of modernization.

Both have high levels of parental employment and a relatively high standard of living. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, both developed an understanding of the structural changes taking place in society and attempted to respond to these changes with social planning and social welfare, including the building up of extensive systems of publicly-funded early childhood institutions. So, when Swedish pedagogues come to Reggio Emilia, there is much with which to identify. But this goes beyond social, cultural and political conditions. There are connections also when it comes to pedagogy. In the Swedish early childhood educational field we have a long tradition of a child-centered pedagogy, expressed by the idea of a dialogue-pedagogy (SOU 1972), and in a recent curricula (LpFö 98) for the preschools (children from one year old up until they start school at six) similar ideas and concepts as those being used in Reggio are introduced.

The Stockholm project: Early Childhood Pedagogy in a Changing World

In 1988 we were a group of nine people, all engaged in one way or another in the field of early childhood pedagogy in Sweden, who started a forum for discussing why so many Swedish pedagogues were attracted by the pedagogical philosophy in Reggio Emilia and what we could learn from there. The group made visits to Reggio Emilia and had the opportunity to meet with the children and pedagogues there.

After a couple of years, all of us in the group felt we were becoming increasingly familiar with the Reggio Emilia philosophy, and more and more sophisticated in understanding and talking about the pedagogical practice and how it related to the underlying philosophical ideas. It seemed to us that it was relatively easy to take on a view of the child as a 'rich' child with huge potential and many competences or a view of the pedagogue as a reflective, co-constructive practitioner - at a surface level. But at a deeper level, what did the Reggio philosophy really mean, both theoretically and in relation to practice?

Fortunately for us, on one of the visits to Reggio Emilia, Loris Malaguzzi proposed that we should start a project together, Reggio and Stockholm. He also pointed out that, although there was a lot of differences between Sweden and Reggio Emilia, he thought we had a lot in common, and that generally speaking he believed that it was in the Scandinavian countries that children were treated with most respect. This faith was born out by what happened next. A project proposal was sent to the Ministry of Social Affairs. This led to the establishment in 1993 of the Stockholm Project which we called Early Childhood Pedagogy in a Changing World.

Reggio Emilia as a prism

Why Malaguzzi thought it was important to start a collaborative work together with us in Sweden, we have understood arose from the fact that so many Swedish pedagogues, administrators of preschools and schools and politicians had been in Reggio and he asked himself why they were coming and what they took back from Reggio. I remember that he once, very seriously, asked, in view of all the Swedish pedagogues visiting Reggio and in relation to their thinking that pedagogical ideas cannot be directly exported, whether many of them were working with the dove- 'The Dove' being, by then the most well-known thematic project in Reggio. I couldn´t help but answer yes. Then he asked "Do you have that many doves on your squares as we do in Reggio?" Then I had to answer no!

How then have we understood the relationship between our project in Sweden and Reggio Emilia? In the project we have never envisaged a direct translation and application of 'the Reggio approach' into the Swedish context. We have never seen ourselves as engaged in an implementation project: this seems neither desirable nor attainable. It has always been clear to us that we have to start from where we are in Sweden, from our own traditions and culture. Hence, our understanding of Reggio Emilia - "our Reggio Emilia" - is not in any sense a 'true' description of Reggio Emilia, but can instead be seen as a construction in which we have built an understanding of their practice in relation to our own Swedish traditions and culture (Dahlberg, 1995). One can say that Reggio has contributed to a specific way of thinking, towards which we could relate ourselves with love and confrontation.

In our own work we have used the Reggio Emilia experience as a form of inspiration. We have often said that we have used Reggio as a mirror or a prism which, together with new theories and perspectives, has helped us to reflect on and problematize our own tradition and pedagogical practices - and enhancing our ability to reflect and problematize our own practice.

In Reggio, they all the time problematize the idea of a transferable 'programme' or a universal 'dove' project, which means that they never give you answers to your questions from a universalized and decontextualized perspective. When Swedish teachers ask questions such as: "For how many weeks do you work with a thematic work?"; "How many children do you have in the project-group?"; "What kind of content do you introduce to the children?", they often get the following answer back: "It depends."

From my perspective this answer shows their understanding of a pedagogical practice as socially constructed - or even better, as co-constructed. Such a perspective implies a relationship which respects the singularity of events, and that there is not only one possible answer or way of working. Reggio´s work offers no position that can be quickly summarized. Instead, like in the most

sustained deconstructive mode, they seem to avoid assuming master discourses. Getting inspiration from their work is more like encountering a series of events, which range over a wide spectrum of contents. This also explains a hesitation in Reggio to 'text bind' their practice into a seamless text which could be seen as the 'Reggio approach', a programme that can be exported and applied everywhere.

When we started our project we were often asked: Why Reggio Emilia? Aren't the Swedish early childhood centres also world famous? Like many others, we originally thought that the Reggio Emilia pedagogy was the same as the Swedish - only they had managed a bit better. Many of the words that we use to describe our pedagogical philosophy in Sweden are similar. As we got to know their work and community, however, we realized that they had transgressed dominant discourses, not only in the field of early childhood pedagogy, but also in relation to organization and community! In that respect the Reggio Emilia experience provides a challenge to the prevalent tradition of early childhood pedagogy, and not only early childhood pedagogy, but also to pedagogy and education, as a whole.

The design and organisation of the project

Before the project had started, Malaguzzi gave us three important pieces of advice: "A project is difficult - when it ends it is as if it never ever existed"; "Do not start a project only for the pedagogy, take in the whole organization"; "Continue to change - do not stick with a method or organisation".

We have tried to follow his advice, but I have to admit that it has not been that easy. We decided to work with a whole local municipality in Stockhom called Hammarby[1]. Within this municipality we chose to work with Åkervägen, a preschool[2] that had already been searching for inspiration from Reggio Emilia, but had found this to be difficult although many of the pedagogues had visited Reggio. The Project offered to work with six other preschools from the same local municipality. These preschools selected one pedagogue from each group of children to participate in monthly network sessions held with the project group, and who in turn was to share her experience with her colleagues at her workplace. Their pedagogical work has been supported by an atelierista and a pedagogista, who have been able to act as tutors for the everyday practice in the network of institutions. Finally, the seven heads formed their own network together with the project leader.

To just choose seven preschools in the district to work closely together with was a very difficult decision to make. However, we had the idea, that to make change

[1] Hammarby is a district of Stockholm with 40,000 inhabitants.

[2] In Sweden the term preschool is used for early childhood institutions with children 1-6 years of age.

happen you have to work in depth and in small steps, and in order to be able to do that we could not have too many preschools at the same time in the network. For the preschools that could not take part in the network we announced that they could later be part of another network, something which also has happened.

An important consideration for us in choosing institutions for the network was that the whole staff group, and not just the head, was motivated to participate and willing to put in the extra work that was required. We offered no financial inducements. The institutions in the network had to work under the same financial conditions as the other twenty or so centres in the district.

In the network we agreed to work with thematic and project work. Swedish early childhood institutions have a long tradition of thematic work, but we wanted to take a critical view of the way this work has been carried out, in particular in relation to the practice of thematic work in Reggio Emilia. We also agreed to work with observation and pedagogical documentation: in Sweden, these terms have traditionally been understood in relation to child developmental theories, i.e. using observations and documentation to assess and classify children against developmental norms. In the project we wanted to bordercross the power of the norm, by creating spaces for exchange of experiences, co-construction and reflection.

Following Malaguzzi's advice on the importance of involving the whole organization we also established a coordinating team, which consisted of the project group, the head of early childhood services in the local authority, the pedagogical consultant in the district, and the head teacher of Åkervägen. We have also had continuous dialogue with the politicians of the district, opening up discussions about pedagogical philosophy and practice. Beforehand, discussions in the local authority had been very much about money and budget problems, and many pedagogues felt that they were not listened to and even wanted to leave their jobs. This had created a defensive atmosphere. The project has helped to create a different atmosphere, in which new pedagogical possibilities can be seen and pursued. We have also started to bring the parents into new forms of participation, in which we seek to challenge common ideas of parents as consumers of services and try to understand what it means to be a participant.

Today the work has spread beyond Hammarby, and we have almost 50 local networks throughout Sweden, and one Nordic network. They receive support from the Reggio Emilia Institute, which has close connections to the Stockholm Project. An annual summer symposium is now held, with participants from all over the Nordic countries. Some elementary schools have started to take inspiration from the project. We have started a journal, Modern Childhood, which disseminates experience from the project, and several undergraduate and doctorate students have chosen to work in relation to the project.

Changing times

The many 'postisms', like posthumanism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, post-keynesianism and post-histoire circulating in our intellectual and cultural lives, are at one level only expressions of a deeply shared sense that certain aspects of our social, symbolic and political universe have been profoundly and most likely irretrievably transformed.

Seyla Benhabib

Theoretically the project started up by challenging the decontextualized images of the child and childhood by locating children, as well as the field of early childhood, in political and structural practices (Dahlberg, 1985). It was our conviction that, if we were to renew pedagogical practice and to restore the legitimacy of early childhood institutions, it was of paramount importance to understand the social phenomenon of childhood and relate that understanding to what kind of society children of today live in and what kind of society they will encounter in the future.

We started this part by analysing the relationship between early childhood institutions and work in industrial society and what consequences the change from an industrial society to a postindustrial information and knowledge society - a learning society - had for these institutions, both in relation to new risks, but also new possibilities for learning and meaning making, freedom and democracy. Although this change seems to resemble the change taking place at the end of the 19th century, when we moved from an agricultural society into an industrial society, the change that we are now experiencing seems to be a more profound change than just a move from an industrial society into an information and knowledge society. The change that we experience now is also related to a change in how we understand the world and ourselves. Since the Enlightenment, this understanding has been shaped by the Project of Modernity, and based on the prospect of a continuous and linear progress, on certainty and universality, and on the discovery of 'knowable' Truths through the application of objective scientific methods.

The American researcher Patti Lather (1991), has stated that we are at a fundamental turning point in social thought, an "epochal shift marked by thinking differently about how we think . . . We seem to be somewhere in the midst of a shift away from the concept of a found world, "out there", objective, knowable, factual, towards a concept of constructed worlds" (pp.9 & 86). An alternative way of understanding is gaining ground which has been called the Project of Late Modernity or Postmodernity. This project recognises, even welcomes, uncertainty, complexity, diversity, non-linearity, subjectivity, multiple perspectives, temporal and spatial specificities (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999).

Operating within postmodernity does not mean rejecting everything that the project of Modernity and the Enlightenment stand for, dismissing all the work that has been undertaken within that project. We agree with Stephen Toulmin (1990) when he argues that we need to try and combine the abstract strictness of modern philosophy and science with a practical love of the concrete details of human life, and by so doing "regain the humane wisdom of the Renaissance, without in turn losing the advantages we won during the three hundred years in which intellectual life was dominated by Cartesian philosophy and the exact sciences" (p. 174).

From a postmodern perspective, there is no absolute knowledge, no absolute reality waiting 'out there' to be discovered. There is no external position of certainty, no universal understanding that exists outside history or society that can provide foundations for truth, knowledge and ethics. Instead, the world and our knowledge of it are seen as socially constructed and all of us, as human beings, are active participants in this process (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

A social constructionist and poststructural perspective

In the project we have chosen to adopt a social constructionist perspective combined with a poststructural perspective. These theoretical perspectives have, until recently, been missing in the field of early childhood education, despite the fact that they are part of on intensive discussion and debate within the broader field of education. We have found these perspectives very helpful and productive for opening up new possibilities - a new space - for the re-construction of the child as well as for the reconstruction of the field of early childhood. I will here try to point to some important insights that we have gained from this perspective, in order to transgress the taken for *given* in our field.

Dominant discursive regimes

From a social constructionist perspective, institutions such as day-care centers and preschools as well as our images of what a child is, could be, should be and can be seen as a social construction. It follows from this that all pedagogical activity can be seen as a social construction by human agents, in which the child, the pedagogue and the whole milieu of the early childhood institution are understood as socially, constituted through language.

The language we use for our constructions shapes and directs our way of looking at and understanding the world, and the way we name different phenomena and objects becomes a form of convention. The French philosopher Michel Foucault (1980) called such conventions - our way of naming things and talking about them - discourses, and those discourses that exercise a decisive influence on a specific practice can, in his view, be seen as dominant discursive regimes, or regimes of truth. Such discursive regimes influence, or govern, our ideas,

thoughts and actions in a specific direction. They become productive. They also constitute boundaries, through processes of inclusion and exclusion, for what during a specific time epoch and in a specific culture is seen as 'the truth', and 'the right thing to do' (Foucault, 1980). By so doing, they also exclude alternative ways of understanding and interpreting the world.

Dominant discursive regimes work through the concepts, conventions, classifications and categories that we use to analyse, construct and describe reality; through them we acknowledge what is seen as true or false, normal or abnormal, right or wrong. They also provide techniques of normalization, such as surveillance, measurement, categorisation, regulation and evaluation. For example, the concepts and categories we use to talk about the child, such as child development and developmental stages, become productive themselves of how we construct or understand what a child is, can be and should be. Hence, dominant discourses exercise power over our thinking and our acting as well as how we govern ourselves through these discourses. They are productive. Therefore, in our project we decided to examine and problematize the dominant discourses in which we are inscribed in order to create a space for the re-construction of alternative constructions of the child, the pedagogue and the early childhood institution.

Together with the pedagogues, we have deconstructed how the identities of the child and the pedagogue have been constructed in the Swedish context and how these constructions have become productive in our pedagogical institutions: in our relations to children, to other pedagogues and in the way we have designed the environment, that is, the whole choreographing of the milieu. For this process of deconstruction Reggio Emilia has been very valuable, as they helped us to see how we are not only inscribed, both as children and pedagogues, in dominant discourse, but also govern ourselves through these inscriptions.

This work has also illuminated how dominant discursive regimes and the practices they produce are tied to power. Right from the start of our project, we found that it was very difficult to get any tolerance for alternative ways of thinking about and constructing the child and the field of early childhood education. This we have come to understand in relation to the ideas of Foucault. We are usually unconscious of the power which is connected to action, and that we are, in one way or the other, always participating in acts of power - for example, whether we permit children to have a lot of free, creative play, or permit them to choose by themselves from various Montesorri materials, or if we permit them to work with clay and observe and document their work (Lenz-Taguchi, 1997).

It is important to emphasize that we are aware that constructions always embody power, and that this is also true of the constructions that we have made of the child, and the pedagogical practices that we have produced from these constructions. This is something we never can get around. We cannot pretend to

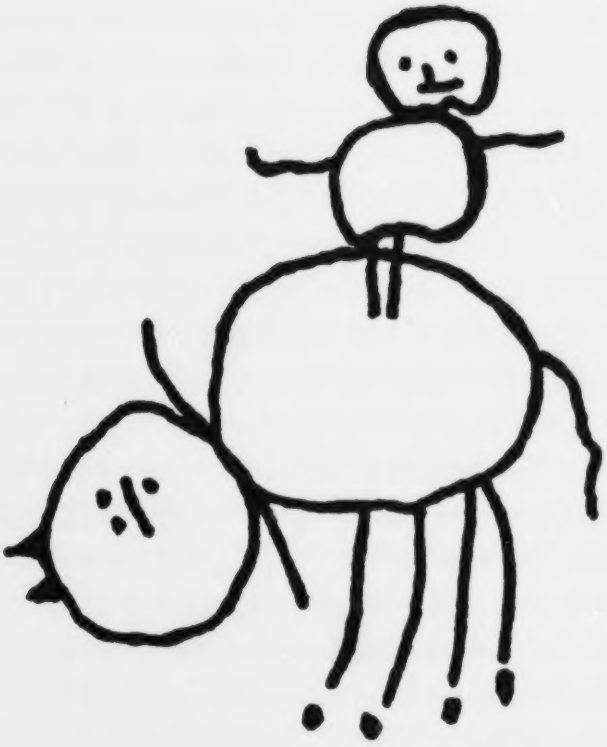
be free of power and to stand outside power relations, we are always within the knowledge/power nexus. Foucault (1970) said, "everything is dangerous", meaning that our constructions are always arbitrary and as such never neutral nor innocent. They always bear social consequences, that is the solutions that we choose have implications not only for the role and position we give the child, but also for how we develop our forms of democracy. In short, processes of construction place a lot of ethical responsibility on all of us (Dahlberg, 1995, Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999).

Many people might consider this talk of power, problematization and (de) construction pessimistic and leading nowhere. However, from our experience in the project, together with the inspiration from Reggio Emilia, we have found them to be quite the opposite, causes for optimism and very productive. It is certainly true that adopting the perspective we have done carries risks, but it also bears possibilities and a potential for dynamic change. If we are subject to power, we also have power. If on the one hand conventions and social representations are embodied and always contain power, on the other hand as arbitrary constructions they can always be open for change. This is why it is so important to unmask and trouble the traditions that are embodied in institutions such as schools and early childhood institutions, and by so doing open up for new possibilities and a new space for change and hope.

For references, please see end of following paper.

Personalised hearing.
Friday night panel opening remarks

Alma Fleet



Personalised hearing.
Friday night panel opening remarks.

Alma Fleet

Following the Keynote Address on Friday evening, an opportunity was offered to the participants for discussion with the Keynote Speaker, Gunilla Dahlberg; the official Australian liaison with Reggio Emilia, Jan Millikan; and the conference commentator, Alma Fleet. The following remarks opened the session.

Gunilla has challenged us that we need new perspectives to help us understand some of these ideas, perhaps to step outside our existing square of perception. Her address has reminded us of the importance of reconsidering the eyes through which we see and the ears through which we hear. Our friends in Reggio Emilia remind us that we all hear differently, despite the fact that we are listening to the same information and ideas. We inevitably sift the speaker's remarks through the lenses of our own perceptions and experience, and relate the words to the worlds which we know, worlds which may only partially relate to the experiences or mental space of others.

I would like to share with you three stories that help to illustrate the fundamental role of what we might call "personalised hearing".

A few days ago, I was leading a workshop with my friend and colleague Catherine Patterson. The participants were from rural and remote settings around New South Wales. The session related to "going beyond the boxes", that is, reconceptualising approaches to planning and programming which are currently being used in early childhood services. In order to help participants relate to the ideas, which were being explored, we invited them to talk with their neighbours about "something good" which had happened in their centres during the previous week. We were thinking in terms of interactions with children or spontaneous events, which might serve as a springboard for discussion about how these opportunities could contribute to planning decisions. After a few moments, we asked people to share the experiences, which had come to mind. The response from one serious-looking woman about something good which had happened at her centre was that, "all the full time staff came to work one day last week". From our city perspective, we were completely taken aback. There was little we could say other than chatting about her circumstances, laughing lamely and hoping that maybe it would happen again next week.

Another incident happened recently which might serve as a reminder to consider the ears through which we hear. I was working as a facilitator with a group of school Principals and Kindergarten teachers, rethinking principles and practices

in the first years of school. Several of the participants had not attended the previous session, so I was quickly summarising some of the ideas related to the importance of the environment "as the third teacher". I was commenting on the influence of "clean lines", of uncluttered spaces in which to work, of the distraction of too many dangling objects and clashing colours. I noted that, rather than being inviting and pleasing to the eye, an environment could simple be

GAWDY.

I was startled by the reaction of a Principal sitting near me, who visibly shrunk inside her jumper and looked at the floor.

I scanned the room and quickly replayed the mental tape-recorder of my previous remarks in order to help discover the cause of the listener's malaise. It dawned on me that I was speaking to staff from a group of church schools, and that the person sitting near me had heard me question the value of a room, which was

GOD-Y.

I hurriedly tried to clarify the use of "gawdy", but the strength of my birthright results in an accent, which makes the two words indistinguishable. Despite some nervous laughter, the situation quickly deteriorated and I simply changed the subject and wound up the session. A cultural difference put a distance between us, which – without a bridge – could have interfered with the sharing of ideas.

Finally, I would like to share one more story, which relates to "the eye of the beholder".

Gunilla was speaking about the importance of deconstructing and reconstructing our conceptions of the field in which we work. I was discussing these ideas with a group of our Masters students who were on campus last month. One of the group had worked in a centre in Northern Australia. She described conversations she had had with the Aboriginal children about their fishing expeditions. She than asked us how we would report back to friends the size of fish we had caught. We put up our hands indicating a fish approximately the length of – say 30 centimetres. She then put up her hands indicating a fish, which seemed to be the length of – say 10 centimetres, noting that this was "a big one". While we struggled with the cognitive dissonance of a "large" fish that was obviously "small", she paused, then told us that the local children were measuring the eating value of the fish, the fleshiness determined by the width – not the length – of the fish. These were not the eyes through which we were seeing, the experiential frame through which we were viewing the world or hearing what we were being told.

I offer these stories to remind us that we each have our own frame of reference for the ideas, which we are exploring here together. The individuality of the interpretation is as critical to the development of the whole as is the sharing of the thinking collectively.

Subsequent discussion with the panel included questions related to helping parents shift perspectives relating to product – oriented assessment, the challenges of focussing on social construction of knowledge in an individually-oriented society, the relationship of "objective observation" to a strong image of the child, constraints of the time-table in a formal school system, and a delightful story about a Swedish child's frustration with a Swedish-speaking staff member who read a Swedish tale in English. The dialogue was engaged.

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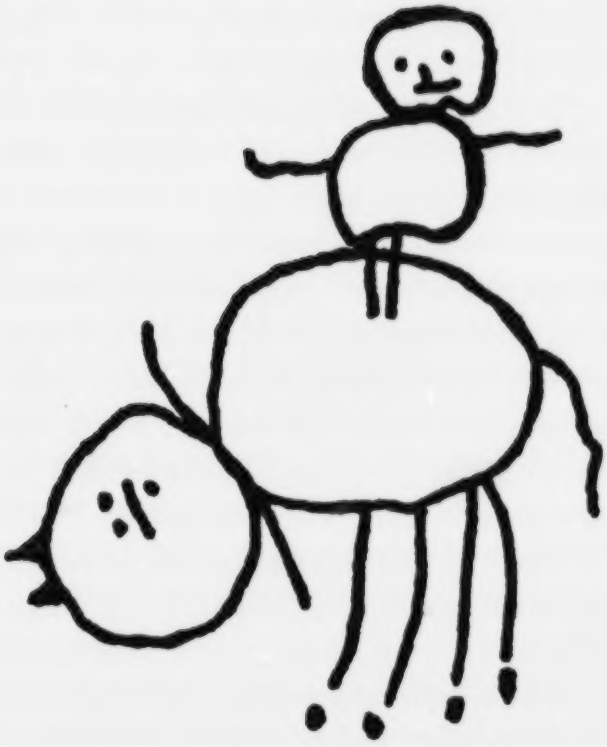
Three different constructions of the child - the childhood landscapes

Gunilla Dahlberg



Three different constructions of the child - the childhood landscapes.

Gunilla Dahlberg

In our work we have made up a strategy of wrestling with and trying to unmask, to step outside and beyond, the dominant discourses and the homogeneous position ascribed to the child, the pedagogue and the parent through these discourses.

In this presentation I will focus on three different constructions of the child, which we have seen being prevalent in the Swedish context, and which have become productive and embodied in our pedagogical practice. We have named these constructions: the child as knowledge and culture reproducer; the child as nature and the child and the pedagogue as co-constructers of knowledge and culture.

From our perspective these discourses, through being embodied, influence the whole 'childhood landscape' - relations between children and pedagogues, children and parents and between children themselves, the organization of early childhood pedagogical institutions, as well as how these institutions are ordered and designed in time and space, and what kind of meaning we give to them. They have consequences for the whole choreographing of the system of early childhood pedagogy.

The child as knowledge and culture reproducer

In early childhood institutions, we often say that we are taking the perspective of the child and that our pedagogical practice is 'child-centered'. What do we mean by that? Child-centeredness seems to be such a concrete and unproblematic concept. Despite the fact that many of us working with children claim as our starting point the perspective of the child, it seems like we have not been able to disrupt the cultural heritage of pedagogy, a heritage where the teacher uses most of the time asking questions, questions which are not real questions, since the teacher already knows the answers. This is a construction of the child, which views the child as an empty vessel. This construction of the child we have called: the child as a knowledge and culture reproducer.

This view of the child is often associated with the tradition in schools but not in early childhood institutions. However, studies show that it does appear in the practice of these institutions, especially during more pedagogically-oriented moments such as 'morning sessions' or 'circle times' (Haug, 1992; Hedenqvist, 1987; Rubenstein Reich, 1993). The following episode, from a morning session at a Swedish early childhood institution, vividly illustrates the power of the

question-answer pattern (Hedenqvist, 1987). Siv, who is the pedagogue, sits with the children, including Bosse and Alvar, in a circle on the floor:

Siv	There is something that does not exist in the air in the wintertime. They are in the air now. Some birds are eating them... something that flies in the air... that we talked about last week and that has come back now...
Bosse	What?
Siv	Yes, what is flying around in the air now... a lot of them...
Bosse	Birds! Bees! Bumble-bees!
Siv	Yes, I´m thinking of a very small insect. You said a...
Bosse	A bumble-bee,
Siv	Yes, (hesitating) and what other kinds of small insects are there?
Bosse	Bees!
Siv	Hm, there are some more insects... those which come and bite you. Do you know which they are, Alvar? The ones which bite us in the summer and then it itches?
Alvar	A bee...?
Siv	Yes, but... (imitating a buzzing sound),
Bosse	A wasp!
Siv	I´m thinking of mosquitos.
Bosse	What...
Siv	Mosquitos

This small excerpt shows children busy trying to grasp the code of what is expected of them from the teacher in a game of what one could call 'Guess what I am thinking of'?' It shows how the question-answer pattern is embodied in the pedagogue and the children. It's a pedagogy of transmission, where the adult is filling the listening child with information or asking for the right answer. It shows how in this type of exchange a very poor and helpless child appears, a child seen as an object without her own resources and potentials, a child, which like an empty container is supposed to be filled with facts, but not challenged.

The child as nature - a decontextualized and a historical child

The second dominant construction, produces an understanding of the young child as nature, an essential being of universal properties and inherent capabilities whose development is viewed as an innate process - biologically determined, following general laws. We often say that this is the way children of that age are, that is their nature, and they are not mature enough for doing other things. This is Piaget's child, since Piaget´s theory of stages has surely been very influential for this construction, even through Piaget himself never put much stress on stages (Dahlberg, 1985).

This construction can be understood in relation to the dominant role science has had since the Enlightenment. As a dominant discursive regime, science has been powerful in the construction of knowledge, through providing rules for separating true and false and thus determining how truth is recognised. Following Foucault's analysis, concepts and classifications in developmental psychology, such as universal stages of development, can be seen as a type of language, which has constructed the child in the Project of Modernity. We can talk of a scientific child, constructed mainly through 'developmental stages, stages that have been productive of pedagogical practice. Through drawing abstract maps - for example, by using theories which say that children of a particular age are egocentric and cannot take the perspective of the other, or that children of a specific age cannot concentrate longer than twenty minutes - we construct classifications that start living their own life by processes of normalization, and hence also constructing teachers and children and their respective expectations and social practices.

As Valerie Walkerdine (1984) argues: "the understanding of the ´real´ of child development is not a matter of uncovering a set of empirical facts of epistemological truths which stand outside, or prior to, the conditions of their production. In this sense developmental (as other) psychology is productive; its positive effects lie in its production of practices of science and pedagogy" (p. 163).

Viewed from this perspective, developmental psychology can be seen as a discourse which not only contributes to the construction of our images of children and our understanding of children´s needs, but also to the construction and constitution of the whole childhood landscape. Theories used to describe children´s development have a tendency to start functioning as if they were 'true' models of reality, becoming a kind of abstract map spread over the actual territory of children´s development and upbringing. Instead of being seen as socially constructed representations of a complex reality, one selected way of how to describe the world, these theories seem to become the territory itself. By drawing and relying on these abstract maps of children´s lives, and thus decontextualizing the child, we loose sight of children and their lives: their concrete experiences, their actual capabilities, their theories, feelings and hopes. As a consequence, all we know is how far this or that child conforms to certain norms inscribed on the maps we use. Instead of concrete descriptions and reflections on children´s doings and thinking, on their hypotheses and theories of the world, we easily end up with simple mappings of children´s lives, general classifications of the child of the kind that say "children of such and such an age are like that." The maps, the classifications and the ready made categories end up replacing the richness of children's lived lives and the inescapable complexity of concrete experience.

Gregory Bateson (1988) warns that we live with the illusion that the map is the territory, or the landscape, and the name is the same as the named. The following quotation from, Lewis Carroll's book *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, suggests the dangers of this kind of mapping:

> *Mein Herr looked so thoroughly bewildered that I thought it best to change subject. "What a useful thing a pocket map is!" I remarked.*
> *"That´s another thing we´ve learned from your Nation," said Mein Herr, "map-making. But we´ve carried it much further than you. What do you consider the largest map that would be really useful?"*
> *"About six inches to the mile."*
> *"Only six inches!" exclaimed Mein Herr. "We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile!"*
> *"Have you used it much?" I enquired.*
> *"It has never been spread out, yet," said Mein Herr: "the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well."* (Carroll, 1893, 1973 edition, pp.556-557)

Not only do these abstract maps drawn from theories of child development make us loose sight of what is really taking place in the everyday lives of children and pedagogues, since reality is more complex, contextualised and perspectival than the maps we draw, the descriptions we make and the categories we use; but they can easily objectify children and ourselves as pedagogues and researchers. The child becomes an object of normalization, via the child-centred pedagogy that has grown out from developmental psychology, with developmental assessments acting as a technology of normalisation determining how children should be. In these processes, power enters through the creation of a type of hierarchy among children according to whether or not they have reached a specific stage, and achieving the norm and preventing or correcting deviations from the norm take over the pedagogical practice.

They can also be seen as examples of what Foucault (1977) calls dividing practices, methods of manipulation that combine the mediation of a science and the practice of inclusion and exclusion. Dividing practices and the related methods of scientific classification are closely connected with the growth of the social sciences which, like other sciences, have come to be a form of language that serves both to include and exclude through claiming to measure what is good and bad, normal and non-normal. Through this scientific mediation the individual child is placed within normalizing systems of classification that assign and measure children and their skills. By dividing children from each other, but also dividing children within themselves, these dividing practices distribute, manipulate and control children, leading to a diagnostic, assessment and

therapeutic culture where normative judgements about the child enter in and take over (Dahlberg & Lenz Taguchi, 1994).

The classification of 'children at risk' or 'children in need' are very obvious examples of such normalising and dividing practices which occupy an important place in many countries. To problematize these classifications of 'children in need' and 'children at risk' does not mean that we think there are no children who would benefit from additional support or who live in poor environments or suffer abuse from adults or other children. All of these are important issues that need to be addressed. However, this terminology is problematic because it is not neutral. It is produced by "historically constructed ways of reasoning that are the effects of power" (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998, p.9). It contributes to a construction of the 'poor child' - weak, incompetent, dependent and privatized child.

Childhood as the innocent period of human life - the golden age

Related to the image of the child as nature is the image of the child as innocent and even a bit primitive - an image which has been intriguing for many centuries. It is a construction which contains both fear of the unknown - the chaotic and uncontrollable - and a form of sentimentalization, almost an utopian vision, where childhood is seen as the golden age. This is Rousseau´s child, reflecting his idea of childhood as the innocent period of human life - the golden age - and his belief in the child's capacity for self-regulation and her innate will to seek out Virtue, Truth and Beauty. Learning to know yourself - your inner nature and essential self - through transparency and introspection has been an important idea. Psychology has legitimated this construction of the young child, especially experts of young children who have placed the child´s expression in free play and free creative work at the centre of pedagogical activity.

This image of the child generates in adults a desire to shelter children from the corrupt surrounding world - violent, oppressive, commercialized and exploitative - by constructing a form of environment in which the young child will be offered protection, continuity and security. From our experience, however, we become more and more aware that if we hide children away from a world of which they are already a part, then we not only deceive ourselves, but do not take children seriously and respect them. Children cannot be understood apart from the world, to be sheltered in some nostalgic representation of the past reproduced by adults. Rather, the young child is in the world as it is today, embodies that world, is acted upon by that world - but also acts on it and makes meaning of it.

This active engagement of young children with the world, and the need for adults to take this engagement seriously, I will illustrate with an experience I once had in Reggio Emilia. One day when I visited the Diana school in Reggio Emilia and entered a fairly large room of the preschool I got very astonished. The whole room was emptied and on the floor a lot of commercialized play-things were lying

around; such as He-man figures, My Little Ponies and other similar figures. As a Swedish pedagogue and also a mother of two children I got really confused. What was going on here? How could they allow such tools? For my eyes in this moment I saw the typical, pedagogically developed wooden play-tools used in Swedish preschools.

I asked the Italian pedagogues what they were working with and they answered that it was a project work on modern fairy tale figures. Once again I was surprised. These plastic and luridly coloured figures, were they modern fairy tale figures? The pedagogues continued to tell me how often they observed children talking about figures and stories they saw on TV and how little they as pedagogues knew about these figures and stories. They also found out how little they listened to the children when they talked about such figures. Often they said to the children, 'we don't talk about that here', or 'we'll talk about that another time'.

To take children seriously, also means to listen to this kind of stories, so they decided to work with a project on modern fairy tale figures. As is common in Reggio, the pedagogues began the project by getting more knowledge themselves through watching the programmes the children also were watching. They interviewed the children too about their knowledge and ideas. To their surprise they found one boy could mention around 25 characters from these programmes, not only their names, but also what kind of role many of them had. As a start for the project the children were asked to bring all kinds of modern fairy tale figures to the preschool and the project moved out from the children´s experiences, stories and ideas.

Returning home from Reggio, I reflected on this experience and how we in the early childhood institutions in Sweden had always forbidden toys like this. I also remembered how I had quarrelled with my son in the mornings when he wanted to bring his He Man figures to his centre. He had often hidden them in his pockets, and I had to feel ashamed in front of the staff. In the early 80s we also had a discussion in educational journals, where the message was that children should be allowed to bring their most precious things with them to the preschool, as they were seen, from a psycho-analytical perspective, as transitional objects. As a result children in many preschools were allowed to bring these figures with them - if they left them in the entrance hall.

I also remembered how often when out shopping with my son, I tried to avoid passing the windows of the toy shop. One day we were anyway in front of the toy shop window and he said to me in a serious tone: 'Mum, now I really have to have a He Man figure'. I answered very seriously. 'Haven´t I told you, you won´t get another one'. Then he looked at me even more seriously and said: 'Mum, you haven´t understood anything'. Then I asked: 'What haven´t I understood'? 'You haven´t even understood that He Man is good'.

Later I thought, what an opportunity as an adult to take children´s theories, hypothesis, dreams and fantasies seriously, instead of seeming not to have heard anything or telling children that they should not talk about these things. Children do embody the world, corrupt or not, like us as adults, and as adults we need to take responsibility to listen to them at the same time as we also have to give them counter-images, but not in any simple way.

The child and the pedagogue as co-constructers of knowledge and culture

When children are born they are washed by an ocean of words, by signs, and they learn the art of speech itself, the art of listening, the art of reading, and to give signs meaning. I mean that upbringing implies the finding of a solution to an increasing competence as far as communication is concerned. Actually, in communication the child´s whole life is contained, man's whole life: the logical tools of thought, communication as a base for socialization, and the feelings and emotions which pass through communication. To learn how one can speak and listen are some of the big questions of life.

Loris Malaguzzi

The third construction of the child that we have constructed draws a lot of inspiration from Reggio Emilia. In this construction the young child, as well as the pedagogue, emerges as co-constructors, from the very start of life, of knowledge, of culture, of his or her own identity.

In Reggio Emilia they always say that they have dared to take, as the starting point for their pedagogical practice, the provocative standpoint that 'all children are intelligent'. They argue that 'if you have a rich child in front of you, you become a rich pedagogue and you have rich parents', but if instead you have a poor child, 'you become a poor pedagogue and have poor parents'. In the words of Loris Malaguzzi: "a child has got a hundred languages and is born with a lot of possibilities and a lot of expressions and potentialities which stimulate each other - but which they are easily deprived of through the education system" (quoted in Wallin, Maechel & Barsotti, 1981). For Loris Malaguzzi and the pedagogues in Reggio Emilia, the child is seen from the first moment of life as a participator in a continuous construction of knowledge and culture. For them it has, therefore, been important to bordercross the "Truths" circulating in the field about what a child is, could be and should be.

According to the above presented theoretical perspective, theories and conceptions of the child we have a tendency to construct the child and through these constructions the child will also understand her/himself. From a constructionist perspective, the child and the pedagogue are reconstructed through their new experiences and actions in every moment. This is a thinking that resembles the thinking of the ancient philosopher Herakleitos who said: "The

second time we jump in a water it is not the same water". As a supplement to his saying we could also say that it is not the same person who jumps.

Pedagogically, this means that we have to construct the child and ourselves as pedagogues anew every day. To enable this, pedagogical documentation can function as a valuable tool.

The idea of the rich child does not mean that the pedagogue should not challenge children´s curiosity and creativity, their questions, hypotheses and theories. In pedagogical work such as we have developed in the project, the pedagogue becomes very important for bringing in challenges - both in the form of new questions, information and discussions, and in the form of new materials and techniques. The pedagogue must be able to master the difficult art of listening, seeing, hearing, questioning and challenging - and by so doing enable children to see that there are multiple perspectives, complexities and ambiguities. In this way, the pedagogue can enhance children's ability to choose and to construct understanding and meaning, and to see new possibilities in complex situations and to construct knowledge in their own local situation - knowledge being understood not as something you own or as some pre-existing truth to be discovered, but as something that is created through being in relation and dialogue with the world. For doing this we must dare to tolerate the idea of uncertainty, recognising that life also embodies ambiguities and complexities with which we have to dare to live.

In this view of knowledge and learning, the pedagogical process is seen as a communicative context, filled with language and expressions. What the child or the pedagogue are saying must be seen as a complex construction of many negotiations, feelings and memories, which never can be fully reconstructed or reciprocally understood by the other. However, what is said can awaken desires, recognition and curiosity in the other, and for this to happen, the question 'have you wondered about something today?' must always be kept alive in the everyday life of the pedagogical practice. Wonder is the primary prerequisite for experience and learning, as many philosophers from Aristotle onwards have recognised. So we must take care of children´s wonder about the surrounding world - a world that can be both familiar and strange.

I remember that Urie Bronfenbrenner once said that "for upbringing to be successful, there needs to be at least one crazy uncle around who astonishes". To construct an environment that astonishes, pedagogues also need to recapture their own wonder, otherwise they will not be able to function as co-constructers together with the children.

Viewing knowledge and learning as a relationship and as communication also problematizes our thinking in relation to the Other. This becomes explicit when

Carlina Rinaldi (1977), the well-known pedagogista in Reggio, describes their idea of a pedagogy of listening:

> *"When we talk about listening we talk about an active as opposed to a passive listening, and about receiving and welcoming. Listening is a welcoming of the Other and an openness to the difference of the Other. The difference of the Other is foremost a right to be different/. . ./ Difference can never be positive or negative in itself, it becomes positive or negative in relation to what kind of receiving and welcoming of difference the single preschool can give. It depends on whether the preschool or society wants to give its children or citizens likeness and anonymity or of it wants to emphasize difference. A preschool or society emphasizing anonymity is much easier to govern".*

We have found that there are many similarities between this idea of a pedagogy of listening and Bill Readings view of pedagogical work as "listening to thought". He says:

> *"I want to insist that pedagogy is a relation, a network of obligation. . . /in which/ the condition of pedagogical practice is an infinite attention to the other. . . it is to think besides each other and ourselves to explore an open network of obligation that keeps the question of meaning open as a locus for debate....Doing justice to thought means trying to hear that which cannot be said but which tries to make itself heard - and this is a process incompatible with the production of even relatively stable and exchangeable knowledge".* (1996, p. 165)

Pedagogical documentation as a way to encourage a reflective practice

In our project we have tried to establish a co-constructive learning culture by enhancing self-reflexivity through listening, dialoguing and analysing, and through pedagogical documentation. To establish a co-constructive learning culture, characterized by continuous change, networking has been central to the project, as a way of enacting a more multi-voiced and multi-centred discourse. How have we worked with the network of pedagogues? We began with a two-day session, where we - the pedagogues and the project group - told our stories about our work from a biographical perspective. The pedagogues talked about their work over the years and how it had changed, both in terms of practice, but also in relation to theoretical and philosophical ideas and in relation to curriculum and wider changes in society. This was a very important meeting. The pedagogues had never talked before about their work in this way, there was never time or space while at work. Consequently, they felt they had never been seen and listened to.

Given our own tradition in Sweden, and the inspiration of Reggio Emilia, we decided that we should then start with thematic work, documenting what was done in the institutions and bringing the documentation into the network. We wanted to focus on, struggle with and reflect upon everyday pedagogical practice. But after a couple of sessions, we realized that thematic work was too far away from our ideas of change. It easily ran into documenting what we have always done, and not problematizing how we have constructed the learning child and the learning pedagogue. We also realized that documentation in itself was a very difficult tool to use; it needed training and new skills. So we changed tack, and decided that we would work with small-scale situations from the institutions, and observe and document them. We would "swim in observations and documentations". In relation to the documented small-scale-situations we asked questions such as:

- Do we see the child? And what do we mean by saying: to see the child?
- Which image and construction of the learning child have we got in our pedagogical practice?
- Which image and construction of knowledge and learning do we have?
- Which cultural tools do these environments give for children´s acting, meaningmaking, symbolizing and expressions?

This turned out to be very fruitful. With the help of different media, such as tape-recording, photography and videos, and through working with observation and documentation of how children explore and co-construct the world and how their learning processes take place, the pedagogues in the project have begun to critically examine their work and troubled dominant discourse in order to change their work and to construct a difference. This can be seen as a form of deconstructive work in relation to pedagogical practice.

When the pedagogues started to listen to the children, and changed their pedagogical relationship, a new construction of the child and the pedagogue appeared. It was a child that, for example, could concentrate on an activity much longer than the pedagogues' earlier constructions had said he or she should be able to. The children in our project are increasingly saying "look what I can do and know", and the pedagogues are becoming more and more aware of the children´s potentialities - what they actually can do rather than what classificatory systems say they should do. The excitement that this has generated among the pedagogues is captured in this comment by one of them: " I have been working with preschool children for twenty years now and I never thought children know and can do that much. I now have got another child in front of me". However, this requires challenges from the pedagogues.

Pedagogical documentation, drawing on small-scale situations from the institutions, has became the main work of the network of pedagogues, but this has not been easy - 'it needed training and new skills'. It also presupposes that

pedagogues and others can organize their work both to prepare documentation and to make time for these processes of reflection. One conclusion from the Stockholm Project and the work in Reggio Emilia is that this is not just a question of resources, but of prioritizing. From the Swedish horizon, we can see that our institutions are having similar economical resources as the schools in Reggio, but we have used the resources differently. When we found out that pedagogical documentation can function as a way of challenging dominant discourses and constructing counter-discourses, through which we can find alternative constructions, we also realized that we had to make more time for documentation. To prioritize, to get time for documentation and self-reflexivity, also implies that we have to discuss what we have to take away.

Visiting Reggio can easily give some despair, as we feel that we do not have the same resources, the same support from our management and our politicians. In our work I have often used the metaphor "to walk on two legs" as a way of not being too stressed of having to make change happen. Dominant discourses are embodied and they cannot simply be thrown away like we can get rid of old baggage. In Reggio they have been working for more than 30 years in small, small steps in a long and continuing struggle.

Pedagogical documentation as a way of challenging dominant discourses

As earlier discussed, according to Foucauldian thinking we always exercise power over ourselves, which means that we discipline and govern ourselves in our struggles to find knowledge about ourselves and the world. Through documentation we can unmask - identify and visualize - the dominant discourses and regimes, which exercise power on and through us, and by which we have constructed the child and ourselves as pedagogues. Because we discipline ourselves and exercise power over ourselves, we encounter great difficulties in changing our pedagogical practice. Pedagogical documentation can contribute to a deepened self-reflexivity and tell us something about how we have constituted ourselves as pedagogues, as it helps 'telling ourselves a story about ourselves' (Steier, 1991, p.3). It can open up a possibility for the pedagogue to see her subjectivities and practices as socially constructed, not as something given, and thus open up an opportunity to break the dominant discourses, as it can broaden our understanding of who we are today and how we have constructed ourselves to be this way, as well as the conditions and dangers of our actions (Gore, 1993). In the process of visualizing and reflecting how we have constructed the child and ourselves lies a critical potential, which in its turn can function as a learning process. This learning process can, at the same time, serve as a starting point for the reconstruction of the pedagogical work. It can operate as a form of in-service training, and as a basis for evaluation.

Visualizing and reflecting on practice requires that the process of documentation becomes an integrated part of the everyday work and not something lying

outside. It is a work that has to alternate between different focuses: on one's own experiences, on gaining a theoretical understanding of what is going on, and on the philosophical and socio-political values that determine the directions and visions for the pedagogical work. There is a need both for closeness and distance, for a continuous wrestling with theories and concepts and everyday practice; allowing for taking multiple perspectives, for looping between self-reflection and dialogue, for passing between the language of one´s professional community (theories and practical wisdom) and one´s personal passions, emotions, intuitions and experiences. In this way, the process can be a way of problematizing one's own understandings and a way of 'working together across differences' (Ellsworth, 1992, p.106).

However, this presupposes that we, when we document, can live with and accommodate the complexity, which always characterizes a pedagogical situation. This 'housing' of complexity also presupposes an ability to leave behind a reductionist cause-and-effect relationship between the observer and what is observed and open up instead for understanding the unique, contingent, local and embodied character of our own productions as pedagogues.

A critical dialogue and debate

To establish a culture of critical dialogue and to enhance self-reflexivity is not easy. If we start asking questions about something we as pedagogues have done together with the children, it is very easy for these questions to be taken as some form of negative critic of our work or of ourselves as persons, instead of treating them as a way to reconstruct our work. We take these questions personally, as if we have difficulty in distinguishing the person from the issue.

Because we are not used to problematizing, we found in the network that we started talking about a lot of things outside the pedagogical work we were currently undertaking, when what was needed was to focus on and become critical about this work. So, we have struggled with this issue and how to construct and deconstruct meaning and practice. In the project we often return to the comment from Vea Vecchi, the atelierista at the Diana School in Reggio Emilia, when we asked her how it comes about that they have got such a reflective and exciting atmosphere. She said: *We discuss, and we discuss, and we discuss and we discuss. All this needs time and a lot of work. But despite the hard work, it has also given us a lot of inspiration. It has been a way to take us beyond ourselves, to think the unthinkable and to avoid a romantic and nostalgic longing back to the ´good´ old times.*

A four year project is much too short. We have not really managed to change the organization, although hopefully that is going on now. The process of change can easily stop if documentation and self-reflexion do not continue. It is easy to start saying now we have found the right way, when what is needed is continuing co-

construction, problematizations and documentation. We get so many visitors who want to come and visit the institutions, and see what we have done, which shows the great interest in the project, but also leaves too little time to develop the work. The questions for us now are how to ensure that experimental work like this is not petrified? How can the process that has opened up continue?

An alternative to traditional child observation

The perspective that we have taken in our project on pedagogical documentation should not be confused with 'child observations'. As we understand it, the purpose of 'child observation' is to assess children's psychological development in relation to already predetermined categories produced from developmental psychology and which define what the normal child should be doing at a particular age. The focus in these observations is not children's learning processes, but more on the idea of classifying and categorizing children in relation to a general schema of developmental levels and stages. Viewed in this way, 'child observations' are a technology of normalization, related to constructions of the child as nature and as reproducer of knowledge. 'Child observation' therefore is mainly about assessing whether a child is conforming to a set of standards. '

There is another important way in which pedagogical documentation and child observations differ. Adopting a modernist perspective, child observation assumes an objective, external truth that can be recorded and accurately represented. It is located in a traditional objectivist and rationalist view of enquiry and observation, in which the world is understood as an independently existing universe and knowledge is understood as reflecting or corresponding to the world. It takes a view that there are intrinsic, essential qualities within the object of observation, in this case the child, which can be found.

Adopting a postmodern perspective, pedagogical documentation does not claim that what is documented is a direct representation of what children say and do: it is not a true account of what has happened. Pedagogical documentation is a process of visualization, but what we document does not represent a true reality any more than claims about the social and natural world represent a true reality - it is a social construction and an interpretation, where pedagogues, through what they select as valuable to document are also participative co-constructers. When you document, you construct a relation between yourself as a pedagogue and the child/children, whose thinking, saying and acting you document. In this respect, the practice of documentation can in no way exist apart from our own involvement in the process. Likewise the staging, that is what we perform of that which we have documented, is also selective, partial and contextual.

What we document represents a choice, a choice among many other choices, a choice in which pedagogues themselves are participating. Likewise, that which

we do not choose is also a choice. Carlina Rinaldi in Reggio Emilia, talks about choosing from many possible uncertainties and perspectives, and daring to see ambiguities. The descriptions that we make, and the categories we apply, as well as the understandings that we apply in order to make sense of what is going on, are immersed in tacit conventions, classifications and categories. In short, we co-construct and co-produce the documentation, as active subjects and participators. There is never a single true story.

An ethics of an encounter

Documentation can offer children and adults alike, real moments of democracy. Democracy which has got its origin in the recognition and the visualisation of difference brought about by dialogue. This is a matter of values and ethics.

Carlina Rinaldi

The art of listening and hearing is primarily an ethical relation - a relation to what the Other is saying, and taking it seriously and with respect. Such an ethical relation with, we have called an ethics of an encounter. The idea of an ethics of an encounter is related to our view of early childhood institution as a forum in civil society, where the child is seen as a citizen and part of a community, and which presupposes that we formulate and continuously reformulate "a social contract" between the individual, the public institutions, the state and the market.

How to establish forms of knowledge and types of relationships that do not simply turn the Other into the same? From our perspective, such a relation must be a relation where the emphasis is placed on an obligation to the Other, without expectation of recompense or exchange. In such an encounter of obligation, the relationship with the Other must be characterized by a rejection of instrumentality, and instead characterized by a tentative and exploratory mode of seeing, listening and challenging. An encounter, a place, where we, as Loris Malaguzzi said, stand in a loving relationship and in confrontation with expressions of the present.

To construct a site of obligation and an ethical practice, one has to encourage confrontation, keep questions of meaning open and value listening to thought. This is a perspective that has much in common with Lyotard's (1988) account of a dissensual community. A community which is not founded on communicational transparency with a reduction of the Other to the status of the addressee. Instead of serving as a loci of consensus, such a community can serve as a loci of debate and dissensus and where the social is the fact of an obligation to others that we cannot finally understand. Bill Readings (1996) has formulated this ethical relation in the following expressive way:

"We are obligated to them without being able to say exactly why. For if we could say why, if the social bond could be made an object of cognition, then we would not really be dealing with an obligation at all but with a ration of exchange. If we knew what our obligations were, then we could settle them, compensate them, and be freed from them in return for payment" (p. 227).

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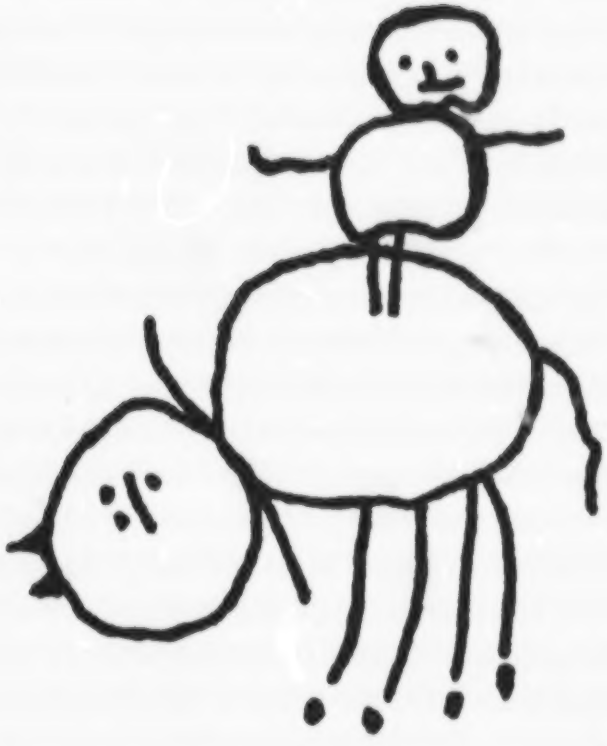
Observation and documentation: "Interpreting the journey"

Janet Robertson



Observation and documentation: "Interpreting the journey."

Janet Robertson

Introduction

What kind of journey you may ask? What sort of journey would you like education to be? Is it a coach tour seeing 15 countries in 12 days with 30 people you don't know and probably won't like? Is education a solo journey up Everest, climbing ever higher, alone? Is it ambling aimlessly through streets or being happily lost in a shopping precinct? Is it a bush walk and the sign says it will take 2 hours and you either take 1 hour or crawl back to the car 4 hours later?

I think each journey is different, suiting the travellers and their companions and the type of experience they want. So climbing Everest might be a good experience, as might the coach tour. But all travel is enhanced by the element of chance. Perhaps meeting the locals, or eating amazing food in unexpected places, or even just finding you like the people on the coach tour. But if the itinerary is too rigid, serendipity and chance are excluded. Educational journeys need to be flexible, suiting the experience desired by the travellers and perhaps even taking them beyond where they at first intended to go.

The reasons for travel and purpose of your visit?

Reggio Emilia, a small town in the north of Italy, has given early educators around the world a great deal to think about. These educators have created a thinking, dynamic educational community which has eschewed conventional educational ways. In grabbing hold of education and looking closely at its role and possibilities, they have developed an image of children as rich, strong and powerful.

No more clearly do we see this mighty child than through observation and documentation or in the Italian, *progettazione*. Working most often with small groups of children, the educators follow, provoke, support, and continually observe and document children's thinking processes during an experience. Documentation is inseparable from the experience, itself having a role in supporting, or acting like a memory, and challenging children as they nut out theories about the world. Characteristic, and illustrative of their well rounded image of the child, many forms of data collection are utilised. Photographs, audio and video tapes, written notes, drawings and three dimensional work are all used as the educators assist children in making their theories visible to the others within the group. This externalising thought (Bruner, 1996) allows children to challenge each others theories, adapt them as a better one comes along and makes the individual and group thinking visible to the educators.

Several excellent examples of this continual decision making on the part of both children and adults can be found in *'Shoe and Meter'*. Six five year old children, given the challenge of measuring a table so the carpenter can make another one, embark on the task. It is important to understand at this point that the educators do not know how much knowledge the children have about measurement. Tommaso and Daniella announce to the others, "We have to draw the table so we can understand it" (Spaggiari, 1997b p.21). These initial drawings, of tables in use with items on top, give the teachers their first opportunity to provoke. They ask the children to take the table out of the room and draw it in isolation essentially pointing the children to look at the table-ness, not the job a table does. And so both educators and children have taken a step along the journey to measure the table. This is a step quite clearly visible to us, eight years and many kilometres away, because of the marvellous act of documentation.

Packing your bags

Before I pack the suitcase, I need to take a look at our own educational 'clothes'. I'll lay claim to two phrases now in currency in Australia, 'extended investigations' and 'documentors' and now I'll coin a new piece of jargon for you here.

As we stride about in the worlds of early education, can we be certain we know what children are learning? Children learn all the time and much of what they learn remains invisible and reveals itself over time. Indiscriminate learners, they learn *stuff*. We know children learn about gender roles, racism, sorrow, humour, music, dust motes, friendship, inequity, their place in the scheme of things, as well as language, literacy, maths, and how their body works to name a fraction, in just the first three years of life. (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; McNaughton, 1999; New, 1997) How children learn *stuff* is not easily graphed, theorised or understood, although countless have tried. Essentially learning *stuff* is messy, and this chaotic blot on the neat landscape of education, a landscape of evaluations, outcomes, objectives, planning boxes and impoverished images of children, exists. The implications of accepting that learning is complex, is not for the teacher's role to be diminished, nor for the continual analysis of learning not to continue, it is simply accepting it is **messy**. Once the paradigm of neatness and certainty leaves early education, we may at last begin to realise a new image of children as powerful, rich, capable and, in partnership with them, interpret the journey.

I am not proposing anything new. We know learning and knowledge to be complex, and that children are not passive recipients in this learning (James et al., 1998; Spaggiari, 1997a) , nor are they simply wandering (or being marched) along some developmental time line (New, 1998) . Children actively, as much as is within their power, determine a great deal of their own learning. It is no mere happenstance that the children engaged in *progettazione* in Reggio Emilia are called "protagonists". So how do we see this learning and then how do we

interpret it? More especially, how do we give a voice to children to enable them to tell us what they know?
Sergio Spaggiari writes, "Giving a voice to childhood thus means recognising children's right to be the primary authors of their lives" (Spaggiari, 1997b) .

Picking the right travel agent

If we regard there to be certainties and neatness in education, how will we 'see' in our planning and decision making surprising opportunities, or take the sometimes torturous path children tread when thinking about *stuff*. As we become more obligated to external influences, our ability to make curriculum choices and trust children to think of important things to think about is curtailed. We are increasingly asked to use the words of industry such as outcomes, to describe education and thinking, a position which endangers real creative theory generation in both teachers and children. Accountability and assessment have gone hand in hand, so that testing young children is proof we have taught them something, not that they have gained the tools with to which gather information. I recently attended a workshop in which a CD-ROM package was being promoted which taught children using developmental stages only, and graded them on their achievement using ABC or D! This was not for children in the early years of school, however inappropriate that is, but infants and toddlers. This packet was claimed to be designed to answer the joint call of QIAS and Regulations* . This method is in my mind a response to the increasing demands for neatness in education, of placing children into boxes.

What you may ask has this to do with observation and documentation in Reggio Emilia? A great deal. They recognise these pervasive influences and challenge them by providing an alternative image of the child: A child freed from the confines of neatness who already knows *stuff* of importance and who can use this knowledge to think about more *stuff*. We see this child because they have made the child visible and given children a voice. In other words they chose the right travel agent.

Choosing your travel companions

Even the most boring trip can be a great pleasure in the company of friends. My idea of hell is to travel in a large pack, however, I've had to do it. It can teach tolerance and humility, but if handled badly - boredom, gossip and pettiness can ruin the entire trip. So it is for children. To continually be crammed together, unable to find personal space in which to cultivate friendships, let alone think collaboratively, is not an ideal educational milieu. Neither should each child be expected to travel alone. Solo travel is difficult and lonely.

* State systems of regulations and accreditation for children's services in New South Wales.

Relationships are an essential ingredient in social constructivist theory. So what children think about hinges in part on who they think with. So who and how do we choose children's travel companions on an educational journey? Naturally, the child/children whose actions or words originally prompted me to consider taking the journey is included, then I create a group around that child. I always start with friends. As young as one year old, we see children showing preference for certain children. Friends can have a shorthand in how they think and play together. They have gone beyond the 'getting to know you' stage and are comfortable with each other. However, this very comfort can lead to habitual ways of thinking. I like to throw in (not really throw, introduce is better) a rogue child, or a combination which will make intellectual sparks fly. Sometimes it might just be adding a pair of the opposite gender, or a child I know who has a quirky way of thinking, who might challenge established thinking playfully. Or I might have observed a child who also is thinking through the same issue, but in a different way. Group size is also important. Three or four children is manageable for me and toddlers, for older children four or six might make a group which is useful to itself and to the individuals within it.

Where do you start the journey?

The toddlers in my class have variously been learning *stuff*, including: musical notation; trees; forest; group rule-making to make games successful; how to play a violin; work; how to arrange a garden party for a horse; internal wall cavities; Teletubbies; brass bands; ladders; tree houses; holes and voids; how to make clay people stand up; friendship; ducklings and fairies to name a few. This list is perhaps not the traditional curriculum for toddlers. We have been able to support them in their endeavours because we accept *stuff* learning is rich and fruitful.

I find toddlers engage in learning about *stuff* which could be deemed developmentally inappropriate, such as maps. Recently one full moon, as we stood outside glorying in its beams, I realised five year old Lachlan believed the moon was following him, and if he walked away from us, we would be unable to see it. As he and the others tested this theory by running about the dark playground calling to each other 'can you see it now?', I marvelled at the depth of their commitment to try and understand *stuff*. For those of you in early years of school settings, *stuff* can make the set curriculum pale into insignificance. The children in Lesley Studans class investigating how to write in Chinese shows the richness children of five are prepared to embellish their thinking. I am always mindful of Rebecca News' comment "As children of all ages spend an increasing number of hours away from their homes and families, discussions of curriculum turn into discussion of children's lives" (New, in press) In other words, educational settings need to be mindful of *stuff* learning, and not only the set or expected curriculum, because *stuff* happens.

Observation: Reading the map.

An educator in Reggio Emilia argued logic and imagination go hand in hand and used map reading as an example. Consider reading a map. We interpret the symbols to mean something and then act on that interpretation. We all know map reading skills , however, can vary widely.
Observations of children are like a map. You need to use imagination and logic to interpret them. It's such a simple word, observe; its simplicity hiding the veils of subjective interpretation already clouding the lens through which we look. Who, what and how we observe are born from theories, experience, expectations, and images of children we hold individually and collectively as a profession. Literally, the child we 'see', is the child we teach.

Map reading also depends on the quality of the map and how the cartographer designed it. The Macquarie university map is I think, a good example of a demented mapper so bound up in his own ideas, none of us are able to interpret it. Or think of the London Underground rail map. It actually bears no physical resemblance to the real position of the stations above ground. It was just neat way of including all the stations and connections on one page. So it can only be used, underground. What about our observations, are they demented, or useful only underground?

- In our observations, do we see strong, powerful and competent children? Or are we looking for incompetencies?
- Do we question our educational certainties when we observe, or confirm them?
- Do we shackle our observations to the taught curriculum?
- What tools do we use to observe with? Do we recognise how observation methods and formats influence what we see? Which theorist informs our choice of observation format? Multiple perspectives are important so do we use photos, video and traces of children's thinking? (Robertson, 1997)
- Do we question reasons for observing? Questions like; What did I look at; Why did I choose it?; What was the point? need to be asked. Sometimes I think traditional observations are as "pointless as polishing firewood" (Roy, 1997)

However, I would like to dwell on four observation questions;

- **Am I looking at individual children?** Do we, with our 'lens of individualism' , observe single children, or do we observe them as a part of a whole, an individual within the group or a group of individuals?
- **Do we see peer teaching?** Flying in the face of current theories, observations of solo children reinforce the paradigm of individualism, rather than embracing the notion that children learn in the company of others. Do we see the tutoring?

- **Do we see sharing of ideas between children?** More commonly and erroneously called copying (with overtones of cheating), sharing or borrowing and giving ideas and adapting them is central to social constructivist theories of learning.
- **Do we see 'one size fits all'?** There is a wealth of current literature about how inappropriate child development as a universal one size fits all theory is. But we still determine children's' progress, or not, using this (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; James et al., 1998; Mallory & New, 1994) Why this fixation on children's developmental progress?

  As we march children along some universal time line of development, do we ever realise that each stage of our lives is probably characterised by some universal developmental steps and that we just pass through them? As we all reach old age (or in the jargon become a geriatric) will we dwell on our declining abilities and have our lives governed by them? It could read something like this. At age 70 eyesight will become increasingly troublesome, vascular constriction will lead to some short term memory loss. At 80 geriatrics tend to dwell in the past etc. Do we, as the subject of this developmental decline remain humans with internal lives, rights and desires? The answer is, we hope, yes. Do we treat children differently? Perhaps there is some truth about developmental stages - but we have ceased to question them, we just apply them. I believe in doing so we straight jacket children into boxes for planning, expected outcomes and success or failure. We also rob children of their power, potential and rights.

As for maps, I'm not suggesting that we use a map to read a child's future. That would impinge on surprises and possibilities. Consider charting unknown waters. It is this concept I use once I have interpreted the observation. Others may read the path the child and I took, but were unable to read it until we discovered where we were going and had in fact been there. This 'after the event mapping,' leaving a trail for others to follow, is not prescriptive of the event itself, only a disclosure of where we went.

Embarkation

So after looking at the map, choosing the agent and companions, we need to set out and take the first steps. Bags are packed, cameras at the ready, video slung around our necks we embark. Still not quite sure of the destination, we are at least equipped to make choices along the way.

To paraphrase Sergio Spaggiari, "We must have the courage to question". In the past children, rather like beetles in a bottle, were supposed to be viewed dispassionately and markers found which assisted the teacher to detect where the child was at, and what the teacher could do about it. This was to be referenced to developmental stages or theorists or as I shall put it 'early

childhood truths' (Dahlberg, 1996) . I believe a good observation throws up questions. It is these questions which can guide my teaching. I think our traditional way of observing has lead us to believe we know certainties, instead of glimpsing or guessing what might be happening. An observation should give several sign posts for future directions, but not the destination. You may have an idea about where you are going, but that may change as you journey along.

Documentation: beyond display and description

Navigating

In collaboration with children, you navigate meanings as you journey. You don't use a train timetable. Documentation is not about certainty, it is about guesses. As Carlina Rinaldi says, be certainly uncertain. Or to put it another way, "We must have the courage to interpret" (Spaggiari, 1997a) . I'm reminded of a conversation with a colleague where we explored the interpretative nature of the entire process of documentation in Reggio Emilia. As discussed, I was taught that observations were to be objective, almost scientific in their distance from the observed. During the course of our conversation, my colleague and I remarked how it had made us feel uncomfortable to view documentation which appeared to be so subjective. No longer were children viewed dispassionately, here were teachers attempting to enter the child's experience, guessing and interpreting the path taken, using the child's traces as a way of marking the journey. Early childhood 'truths' were out the door, as these teachers engaged in a discourse about why they thought certain points in the children's experience were important.

Modes of transport

The medium in which children work, may in part determine the intellectual responses they can make to each other. Clay and line propose different solutions and problems to children while they are working with the media. Clay may prompt children to think in three dimensions, offering support to children exploring concepts of 'behind'. Devoid of colour, line may enable children to find detail, and understand a concept, such as Tommaso and Daniella saying they needed to draw the table to understand it. Photographs, drawings and transcripts can aid memory, but as Forman mentions, may enable you and children "To think about what you cannot see" (Forman & Fyfe, 1998) In essence, children during the course of an investigation may be challenged to draw or discuss something which normally is not visible. Formans' example is of children drawing what's inside a seed, thereby uncovering a multitude of seed germination theories. It also gives you the teacher, a clue or idea about what to do next, as did the first drawings of the table. Once on paper and visible to others, children can advance their theories about measurement and seed germination as their ideas are now out of the closet.

It is also possible to utilise photographs in much the same way. "The photograph should be treated as a door to enter a world of possible events, not as a window that pictures a single time and place" (Forman & Fyfe, 1998, p. 248). A photograph should enable children and adults to re-enter the experience and step forward In re-entering the photograph, children and adults experience the events pictured from a new view point. Teaching children to move beyond just reiterating what is in the picture, such as "there's me, that's you, there are my pink socks" requires the teacher to ask questions which move the children beyond mere description, to interpretation ..."what were you thinking", or "what happened next" and "why". "I wonder what really happened there?" and 'I wonder what would happen if...'? are questions we may find hard to ask coming as we do from a position of teacher certainty. We certainly don't want to be asking children questions to which we already know the answers (Dahlberg, 1996) .

Stages of the journey

1. I currently think there are three stages to documentation. First there is the assembly of a work in progress. As an investigation proceeds, all those precious observations, forecasting decisions, drawings, photographs, transcripts, notes and family thoughts have to be kept somewhere, retrievable at an instant and dated and ordered. This collection can take many physical forms and is used daily as the investigation progresses, enabling the group of children and teachers to re-visit yesterdays' work.

In-process documentation is the key to how you make decisions. Re-reading transcripts, looking at video, or puzzling out what something may mean gives the teacher the opportunity to make informed forecasts about what to do. Reading an observation about what I thought was a discussion about tree houses, it dawned on me it was more likely these young toddlers were drawn to the impressive ladders in the pictures. So we veered off towards ladders, rather than stick with tree houses and entered a world of different perspectives. Another occasion was at the clay table. Several boys were making individual roads. One child invented symbols for traffic lights, and pedestrian crossings, and this invention became a common convention, used by all the boys. Watching their acceptance of common symbols and understanding, they were able to share ideas. The next day I asked if they could make a road together. Four weeks of joint clay roads and mapping resulted.

Home again

2. The second stage is when the investigation is over and a long travelogue of what happened, when and by whom, is collated. Spaggiari discusses this 'linear summary' (Spaggiari, 1997a) as giving the 'illusion' of completeness, but which in essence misses the point. Trapping the experience in the cloak of reality, it shuts out the possibility to interpret what happened and why. My first large

documentation/description about an extended investigation titled *Pink*, is a weighty tome. Every breath the children took during that 2 months is recorded. This pink collation tells a story, but not the essence of what really happened.

Sorting the photos

3. So comes the third and hardest stage. This entire bundle of traces, paths taken and visible thinking does not become the finished piece of documentation. An interpretation of the essential elements and discoveries made by the children (and teachers) is created. When I first went to Reggio Emilia in 1992, *Shoe and Meter* had just been completed and the table alone, adorned with the drawings, photographs and with its dual measurement system devised by the children, stood proudly in the hall. Since then a more expanded version, (the book) has been produced. In other instances documentation becomes a wall panel, perhaps giving rise to the misconception by many that it is a display.

Documentation is beyond display and description. It enters into an attempt to seek what is not immediately visible. Like a hunter, the documentor tracks,

> *"plots and paths that are not necessarily sequential, to give meaning to events and processes in an attempt to reveal their mysteries. This means we do not need to focus solely on the actual succession of facts, but rather to purse, by way of the story, a possible understanding of the intricate adventure of human learning"* (Spaggiari, 1997a).

It takes a courageous and time rich documentor tò reach this final stage. It interprets the journey. But at a cost. This third stage is hard, and needs several essential elements to nurture a documentor and the work to this point.

As mentioned, time, or more correctly distance, between the completion of the travelogue and an attempt to analyse what might have been happening is important. It is very hard to let go every loved and treasured moment in the experience. For the benefit of the unknown reader (and incidentally, re-interpreter) transparency and detail in the subjective process is vital. This is where the notion of the child's voice, multiple perspectives, clarity of traces and data become more than a notion. It also takes collegiality and collaboration with families, children and colleagues to reach into the kernel of an experience.

And lastly it takes personal courage. When documentation is complete, you are essentially putting your professional self on the line. Fortunately as one is trying to involve others in the discourse about what might have happened, you are not having to claim a certainty, just a point of view.

Choosing the photo album

My pressing need is to make documentation possible and simple to do. The point is to get the information out. As Spaggiari says, "many educational experiences, even the most progressive, risk remaining anchored only to the personal memories of individual educators" (Spaggiari, 1997a). As a profession, we have beaten our breasts and bemoaned the fact that the community does not understand what we do, children are undervalued, and we are by default undervalued too. Well one startling reason is, we've kept the how and what of early education is a secret (Stonehouse, 1994). Not only is documentation a way to showcase what children are capable of, and to open up the debate about learning, it supports the role of teachers and the importance of early educators (Katz, 1993).

Documentation can take any physical form it wishes. It could be a web site, a jotted note, a folder, an exhibit in a show case, an array of clay figures with a written interpretative sentence, a book, a large panel on a wall or a photograph with arrows and scribbled interpretations on it. It is possible that the panels of documentation in Reggio Emilia are so bewitchingly beautiful that the real business of documentation gets lost for the first time viewer. Documentation is not only about its physicality. Documentation, or at least its physical form, making children's thinking visible, should also suit the culture in which it is situated.

The Reggio Emilia educators have earned the right to dwell on how a piece of documentation looks, as well as what it says. It took forty years to develop their style; let us begin developing ours. When I first started work at Mia-Mia, I attempted panels, but the blue tak came off or was eaten by the toddlers. So it was easy to abandon the Reggio Emilia look alike and devise something that suited us. I realised in book form, the toddlers could access it at any time. Moreover, if it was plastic covered then it could withstand the rather heavy duty use it would get. These A3 and A4 plastic folders are the result. Families who use Mia-Mia are not always from the local area, and are usually too busy to linger reading large wall panels. Portable documentation means they can borrow and take it home or show work mates, and enter into the information at their leisure. These books had the added bonus of being infinitely expandable, so further investigations by children could be added as a postscript, or family contributions could easily be included. One role for documentation is to take the discourse of how and what children know and learn to the rest of the profession. I'd find it hard to wave a panel at you.

'The trip'; showing your friends and family

Further use of documentation is its use on completion. Acting like a group memory, the experience documented becomes a tangible part of school culture. It is not surprising to see similar investigations/ *progettazione* re-emerge

periodically, linked in some way to past documentation. Children peruse the books and panels, either remembering their own past experiences, or considering others. Mapping in the toddler room is an example of this reoccurring topic.

Travel broadens the mind

Children are not the only visitors to past documentation. As a teacher, I now find echoes of past investigations are always to be found in new work. Ideas resurface, extended and expanded as I dwell on the similarities and possible causes for certain toddler behaviours. My interest in environments and how children perceive them is evident in two pieces of documentation. The first was examining children's interest in a small locked service cupboard, when after much close listening and observing, we realised they had no concept of the internal wall cavity being only 50 cm wide and had invented an entire internal world with doors, rooms and inhabitants. The second piece of work was with ladders, where children's view of the room from the top of a ladder had them speechless. Both works were peppered with ideas about children's perceptions of space. Returning to a teacher's place in documentation, I believe traces of your growth as a teacher should be visible. *Progettazione* is a journey for you, and as such your growth should be mirrored in the work. In the process of documentation, of externalising thought, (Bruner, 1996) you understand more about yourself and children.

Constraints; travel shooting

On any journey there are compromises, things you'd wished you done differently, places you'd rather not have gone to. Are there constraints in observation and documentation? Of course. There are ethical issues, the investigation of the service cupboard was nearly derailed in its early stages when we realised the children thought a cat lived in it. How could we follow up on that idea, when it smacked to us of animal maltreatment? But close observation saved the day and once we established the children had created an entire family, house and feline friendly world behind the door, we were able to continue. A further constraint is when you realise the same group of children begin to feature more than others in your work over the year. To ensure you work across the room giving each child a chance to participate in an extended investigation, you may have to ignore a possibly dynamic investigation in favour of the unknown. I'd prefer not to label time and money as a constraint, as I rather think they can become excuses not to start. It is possible to travel on a shoestring.

Where to next?

Where do you begin? Quite simply you just have to begin, do something, start somewhere. Because as you do, you learn. There is no one way to begin this,

just as there is no one way of observing and documenting. Let go certainties and travel. Be a researcher with children, let *stuff* happen and mess up the neat landscape of education. Life is a journey and *stuff* happens.

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Summary of documentors

1. Hospitals: Wendy March - Kurri Early Childhood Centre Inc.
   (2-3 year olds)

2. Dem Bones, Dem Bones: Michele Roberts – Newcastle Research.
   (3-5 year olds)

3. Frog Project: Robyn Cram – The Junction Public School, Merewether.
   (5-6 year olds)

4. The Moon: Michelle Palmer – The Beresfield Community Child Care Centre.
   (3-5 year olds)

5. Moving Things Project: Bronwyn Wheeler – Kent Road Public School.
   (5-6 year olds)

6. Why do we build? Barbara Raczynski - Kent Road Public School.
   (6-7 year olds)

7. Aesthetics of a year one classroom: Danielle Allan – Kent Road Public School.
   (6-7 year olds)

8. Trains at Carinya! Janee Binee – Carinya Children's Centre.
   (2.5 year old)

9. Under 2's learning – 1999: Stephanie Richards – Wollongong TAFE Children's Centre, Infant and Toddler Room.
   (0-2 year olds)

10. Baby Care – 1998: Margaret Gleeson – Western Suburbs Child Care Centre, Early Childhood Room.
(20 month old)

11. Hermit Crabs -1999: Racheal Lincoln – Western Suburbs Child Care Centre, Early Childhood Room.

12. A Goodbye Place: Samantha Bowden, Stanwell Park Children's Centre.
(3-5 year olds)

13. The Kite Flyers: Samantha Bowden, Stanwell Park Children's Centre.
(4-6 year olds)

14. Our Pet Project: Sarah White - Deakin Child Care Centre.
(3.5-5 year olds)

15. Titanic: Jodie-Lee O'Leary - Wollongong TAFE Children's Centre.
(Preschool Room)

16. Research Illawarra. Collaborative documentation of some changes to centre environments: Foyers, block areas, writing areas, home corners:
Wollongong TAFE Children's Centre - Jodie-Lee O'Leary, Stephanie Richards, Emma Grech; Wollongong City Preschool - Alison McKinnon;
Stanwell Park Children's Centre - Samantha Bowden &
Western Suburbs Child Care Centre - Margaret Gleeson

Summary of documentors

HOSPITALS

The documentation consists of two A3 panels titled "HOSPITALS', highlighting a dramatic play experience between a small group of 2-3 year olds.

The first panel contains a paragraph briefly explaining the play experience and how it slowly evolved, beginning with two children, and then with other children becoming involved.

The second panel contains a transcript of the conversation between the children as they interacted with one another, including photographs of the children as were talking to each other and acting out the dramatic play experience.

Wendy March – Kurri Early Childhood Centre Inc

DEM BONES, DEM BONES

This investigation began with one child's question about the purpose of muscles. It grew through small and large group experiences with 3-5's to research parts of the body over a number of months.

The documentation is presented in folder form and reveals a beginning attempt at unfolding the story of the children's and teacher's journey. It includes photos, teacher interpretations and children's individual and group graphic representations.

Michele Roberts – Newcastle Research

FROG PROJECT

This project was instigated by children's interest when a parent brought in a tank of frogspawn for us to observe.

The 5-6 year olds in my kindergarten class at The Junction Public School engaged in great discussions, observations and activities over a period of approximately three weeks.

The documentation presented here follows children's initial observations and artwork, their developing knowledge as they explore a variety of activities (3D models and music making shown here), and their final (for now!) understandings and awareness as reflected in their later artwork and musical performance.

Robyn Cram - The Junction Public School, Merewether

THE MOON

I am currently working with a group of twenty children, aged 3-5 years in a long day care centre. Some of the children began making rockets and spaceships with various construction materials, then another mentioned "footprints" on the moon when reading a book about going to the moon. I found an article with interesting pictures of the moon and used this as a stimulus for discussion and to find out the children's ideas. The children verbally expressed interesting perceptions about the moon and what was on it, as well as depicting these ideas in drawings. These pictures were revisited on another day and the children are continuing to show interest in this topic. I intend to continue monitoring and recording further interest in this area as many children are currently exploring rockets and spaceships.

Michelle Palmer – The Beresfield Community Child Care Centre

MOVING THINGS PROJECT

This has been an open-ended study of things that move with Kindergarten children from Kent Road Primary School. It began with a discussion about what the children wanted to learn about at school. The children's interest were diverse so this topic allowed for a wide exploration area. Our studies were based around the book *What makes things move by Althea.* Each page resulted in many discussions and lines of inquiry as documented in the KLA summary.

The children's thoughts are captured in their explanations of models they made and objects found in our room. KW's greatest personal excitement was in the making and developing of our town mural. This is still referred to in classroom discussions. The children recorded a story about People town on the computer and these are displayed. The topic is still ongoing.

Bronwyn Wheeler - Kent Road Public School

WHY DO WE BUILD ?

This project was instigated by children's continued interest in building/making things in Building and Creative corners in a Year 1 classroom. The documentation presented shows some of the children's ideas which came out of discussions, a time line of the developing sequence of activities as children developed their knowledge, understanding and peer-collaboration skills.

Barbara Raczynski - Kent Road Public School

AESTHETICS OF A YEAR ONE CLASSROOM

This project began in the third week of taking over as teacher of a year one class. This work originated from my own desire to have a working environment for children that was interesting and meaningful to them. The project involved asking people in our school community to assist us in investigating and learning about creating a pleasing working environment and maintaining it. My overall objective was to have the children take responsibility and ownership of their room; through learning about creating a pleasing environment to work in. This investigation of work was different to all others I have done, as I knew the overall objective, but did not have a set plan of the learning experiences I was going to provide to achieve this. The experiences evolved over a term, being lead by the children rather than through me. It was important to me that this integrated the NSW curriculum areas and was not taught as a separate "project". The work has been for the duration of the term and is seen as only the beginning of the children's learning about aesthetic aspects. I consider this documentation to reflect a teacher in the beginning stage of implementing this type of documentation.

Danielle Allan - Kent Road Public School

TRAINS AT CARINYA!

This documentation began with a single child and developed into a long-term project. David is the focus of the documentation, with his interest in trains being the centre of the project development. David is two and a half years old and demonstrates to his teachers and peers his love of trains. David continues over many months to return to the activity of track and tunnel making and establishes many ways of creating tracks and train with a variety of materials. This has been an exercise in the promotion of project for children under three years and has allowed the interests of one child to be explored and extended.

Janee Binee - Carinya Children's Centre

UNDER 2'S LEARNING – 1999

This includes, simple documentation of children under two years using photos and interpretation to make visible the children's learning. All children are represented in this documentation which is displayed on the wall with new documentation displayed bi-monthly.

Stephanie Richards - Wollongong TAFE Children's Centre, Infant and Toddler Room

BABY CARE –1998

This is, simple documentation of a twenty month old child, using photos and anecdotes. For a number of weeks Courtney explored the role of caring for a young baby, using dolls in home corner.

Margaret Gleeson – Western Suburbs Child Care Centre, Early Childhood Room

HERMIT CRABS – 1999

This is, simple documentation of children investigating hermit crabs using photos and anecdotes. Originally added to the environment as a separation "handle" the crabs were the focus of attention for a number of months.

Racheal Lincoln – Western Suburbs Child Care Centre, Early Childhood Room

A GOODBYE PLACE

Working with children aged 3 to 5 years

This documentation panel is about children solving a problem presented to them by myself. The dialogue and illustrations track the process of finding a solution. This is achieved through discussion, drawings, collaboration, experimentation and finally completion of the project, building a periscope. During this investigation the children experience conflict and resolve this in a positive, creative way.

Samantha Bowden - Stanwell Park Children's Centre

THE KITE FLYERS

Working with children aged 4 to 6 years

This documentation is about the children reading a book on building kites and then deciding to build their own kites. The discussion extends to the drawing table where the girls initiate drawing their own kites. The investigation ends in an excursion to a local park where the children fly their kites and coming home to draw their day's outing. This documentation extends over two months and has been condensed for display purposes.

Samantha Bowden - Stanwell Park Children's Centre

OUR PET PROJECT

Our project occurred with a group of three and a half to five year olds. Following the death of our pet goldfish I went to purchase another fish and asked myself WHY? Are the children interested in having another fish? I returned to the preschool without a fish and spoke with the children about the fish, and pets in general. This was the beginning of our long (6months) project on pets. The documentation displayed is in three parts:

1. The decision process and purchase of a new pet
2. What happens if Jake (our new pet) gets sick; and
3. Jake's first birthday.

This project generated a lot of fears for staff, e.g. what happens if the children choose to have a pet horse? This was at one stage a possibility and it created a lot of questions for staff in terms of what do we do if the horse vote outnumber other votes? There is no way we could have a pet horse – is there?

Sarah White - Deakin Child Care Centre

TITANIC

This documentation was of an investigation by a small group of preschool aged children.

Investigation covers many areas of the learning environment including: block area, writing area, various art media, the involvement of families and the use of technology.

Jodie-Lee O'Leary – Wollongong TAFE Children's Centre, Preschool Room

RESEARCH ILLAWARRA

COLLABORATIVE DOCUMENTATION OF SOME CHANGES TO CENTRE ENVIRONMENTS

Foyers, block areas, writing areas, home corners

This project is documenting similarities and differences in the changes made to four Illawarra centres in response to learning about the Reggio Emilia philosophies, communicating through this documentation the influences on our centre philosophies and practice, and also documenting some of the implications of these changes for children.

Wollongong TAFE Children's Centre - 24 place, Long Day Care Centre. Researching and interpreting Reggio Emilia philosophies for 3.5 years Jodie-Lee O'Leary, Stephanie Richards, Emma Grech

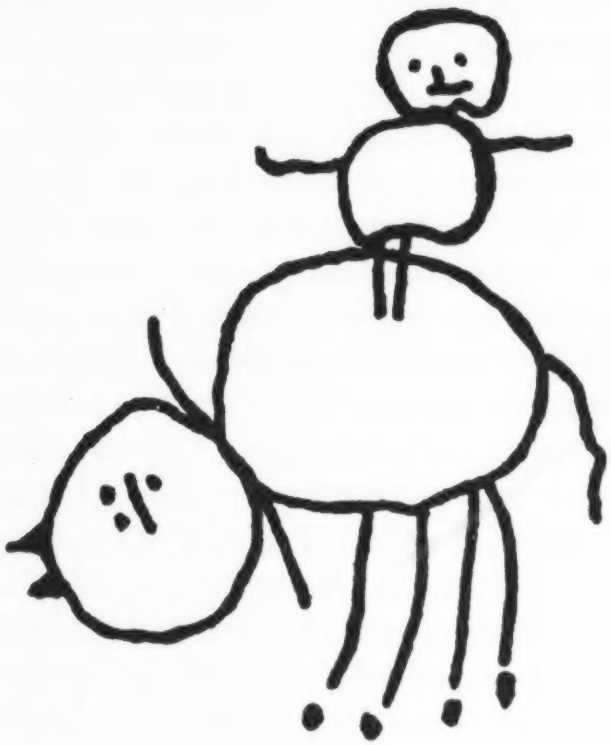
Wollongong City Preschool – 20 place, Preschool. Researching and interpreting Reggio Emilia philosophies for 18 months - Alison McKinnon

Stanwell Park Children's Centre - 26 place, Long Day Care Centre. Researching and interpreting Reggio Emilia philosophies for 1 year, 4 years within the Illawarra - Samantha Bowden

Western Suburbs Child Care Centre - 44 place, Long Day Care Centre. Researching and interpreting Reggio Emilia philosophies for 4 years – Margaret Gleeson

The last word

Alma Fleet



The last word.

Alma Fleet

When Janet and I were discussing this conference, I said that I would be happy to take any role which she would like to give me, as long as I had the last word; so here we are. Each of you, of course, will make your own last words with each other about the ideas which we have been sharing.

For example, we might remind ourselves about the "D" words, which we've been thinking about during the conference – the difference between Display and Documentation:

> *When applied to negotiated learning, displays should be converted to documentation by adding interpretation and explanation to the graphics. A set of photographs pasted to posterboard showing a trip to a farm is a display. A set of photographs captioned with the children's words would still be a display...*
>
> *Documentation invites enquiry about the children's thinking and...about effective teaching...the teacher's commentary is necessary to frame the data as examples of something more general, some principle that can be applied in new contexts. Display invites pleasure and satisfaction, but is not deliberately designed to provoke hypotheses. Documentation is a research report used to enhance discourse rather than a record of past events.* (Forman and Fyfe, 1998, pp245-246).

Then, to recognise the intellectual property of some of the first thinkers of these ideas, I would like to give one of the last words to Carlina Rinaldi, the pedagogical director or the Municipal infant-toddler centres and preschools in Reggio Emilia. In doing this, I would like us to remind ourselves that we are taking up the challenges sparked by a set of philosophies and practices, which emerge from the work of educators in Reggio Emilia, Northern Italy.

It is important to note that educators throughout the world are thinking through the challenges presented to us by these Italian educators. Their work does not include a program or even an "approach" (although the experience is often mistakenly referred to in that way). There is not something there which any of us might "copy," although again, there are claims, particularly in the United States, that the interest in these community centres for children from 0-3 and 3-6, is only a fad. On the contrary, the Italians invite us to join them in thinking through issues related to the nature of teaching and learning, the roles that our schools have in society, the worlds in which children of today are likely to be living tomorrow. They are thoughtful, with their work based on complex philosophies related to the richness and competence of children. Their work is an opportunity

for us to revisit some of our beliefs and practices as part of our own ongoing professional development.

Their work, which has been developing over 50 years, emerged from the devastation of war in the region, and a belief that there were better ways for children, families and communities to work together. Resultant ways of working with children promote what we might call authentic interactions (rather than those controlled by ritual or routine), rigorous intellectual investigations by both children and teachers (so that everyday teaching experiences often become incidences of co-research), in environments which are influenced both by aesthetic and pedagogical decision making. The use of multiple forms of meaning-making appears often in this way of working, revisiting experiences with children to deepen understanding, often through a range of media including clay and wood as well as detailed attention to such things as sketches and painting.

One component of this way of working is a way of teaching which is heavily reliant on detailed observation of, and wondering about, children working, playing, interacting, investigating their surroundings and questions of interest to them. Most of these encounters involve two or three children and often help to make explicit the social construction of knowledge.

> *Documentation helps us support children as they construct processes of knowledge. It makes possible a deep reading of the traces of individuality of each child and of the children together...*
>
> *Collegiality is the best goal of documentation...it offers a context of learning...in order to create a space where parents, children and teachers are researchers together.* (Rinaldi, Winter Institute, January, 1997)

Each of these phrases offers us ideas rich with potential, which we can think more about. We might also choose to think more about what education is itself, as both Gunilla and Janet have challenged us too.

Finally, we have the "P" words from this conference, which we might muse about: "Problematise" and "Provocation". I will leave these with you to guide your journey until we meet again.

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Profile of Speakers

Gunilla Dahlberg

Professor of Education at the Institute of Education in Stockholm, Department Of Child and Youth Studies

Gunilla has served on several Government commissions and is currently working on a project "Early Childhood Pedagogy in a Changing World." In this project she is working with 28 pre-schools in the Stockholm community. This project is carried out in co-operation with the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy and the Reggio Emilia Institute in Stockholm.

Alma Fleet

Associate Professor and Head of the Institute of Early Childhood

Alma has always been passionate about the learning of children and teachers. Her interests include Reggio Emilia and the professional enhancement of early childhood educators.

Janet Robertson

Toddler teacher, Mia-Mia Child and Family Study Centre, Institute of Early Childhood

Janet was previously an Adviser and Director. She first visited Reggio Emilia in 1992 and as a result of this and subsequent visits, she returned to teaching to explore the implications first hand.

Acknowledgments

The Conference Committee would like to thank the conference presenters for sharing their expertise so generously with the participants; Alexandra Harper for the organisation and administration of the conference; Wendy Shepherd for the style and ambience we enjoyed on the day; the Institute of Early Childhood students involved in workshops and organisation support and to Rachel for the rider and horse.

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